



Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission

204 East Academy St. ♦ P.O. Box 771 ♦ Asheboro, North Carolina 27204

November 25, 2014

The Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission (HLPC) met in the Meeting Room of the 1909 Historic Courthouse at 145 Worth Street, Asheboro, NC, and the meeting was called to order by Chairman Hal Johnson at 2:00 p.m.

Members present were Hal Johnson, Chairman; Fran Andrews, Vice Chair; Warren Dixon, Nan Kemp, Lynne Qualls, Marsha Haithcock, and Mac Whatley. Bill Ivey, Bill Johnson and Robyn Hankins were absent.

Discussion of HLPC Administrative Reorganization

Chairman Johnson stated what an honor it had been to serve on the HLPC and how much he had learned even though he was born and raised in Randolph County. He announced that he has been appointed as the County Manager and with that he had been putting thought into the recommendation for his replacement on the HLPC. He said he couldn't think of another organization that promoted our history and heritage better than the Public Library and the Randolph Room. At the January meeting of the Randolph County Board of Commissioners, he said he will be recommending that Library Director Ross Holt be appointed to take his seat as the ninth voting member position, which was set aside for a County employee on the Commission, and that he manage the administrative functions. Mr. Holt will coordinate the functions of the HLPC and the Planning Staff will continue to provide staff support. If the Board of Commissioners approves this recommendation they will also need to make some minor changes to the ordinance that created the Historic Landmark Preservation Commission.

Chairman Johnson said he looks at it as an expansion of the ability to share information about the history and heritage of Randolph County.

Request To Move the Courthouse 1838 Belfry Bell

Chairman Johnson welcomed Guy Troy, who presented this request. Mr. Troy is a decedent of John Balfour Troy, who along with Johnathan Worth and Hugh McCain were ordered by the Randolph County Justices in 1838 to buy and hang a bell in the belfry of the 1835 County Courthouse. It was later moved to the belfry of the 1909 Courthouse after it was constructed. When the new courthouse was built in 2002, the fate of the 1909 Courthouse was uncertain. The County wanted to preserve the bell and had it reconditioned and relocated to the 2002 County Courthouse, no longer able to ring, but in a glass case located outside the Clerk of Court office on the second floor, more visible than ever.

Mr. Troy thanked Mac Whatley for his work on his published book in 1985 of Architectural History of Randolph County, for without this he would not have known about the 1838 Belfry Bell.

Mr. Troy said he was very pleased when the Commissioners had the bell refurbished and said they did a wonderful job restoring the Historic Courthouse. He said he would like to see the bell

return to the Historic Courthouse so more people could see it and revel in the story of it and the early days of the history of the County. Mr. Troy offered to help fund the move.



Mr. Troy said he appreciated the work of the HLPC and the Randolph Room for preserving history and providing a location where many people from all over the world can research history and genealogy.

Mr. Whatley added that in 1976 the County wanted to ring the bell, but realized the rope was missing. County employees went up in the belfry and rang it with a hammer. Because the bell is made of brass and tin, which are soft metals, there are marks on the side of the bell.



Mr. Whatley has researched the maker of the bell, which has the inscription of “G.H. Holbrook, Medford, MA, 1838.” G.H. Holbrook is a well-known New England bell foundry and one of the earliest bell foundries in MA. Major George Holbrook learned bell founding under the mentorship of Paul Revere and started casting bells on his own in Brookfield, MA between 1779 and 1816. In 1816 he moved his bell foundry to East Medway, MA. Major Holbrook was succeeded in the business successively by his son Col George Handel Holbrook (G.H. Holbrook), who was born on July 21, 1798, in Brookfield.

Mr. Whatley read the following editorial from *The History of Medway*:

Major George Holbrook, who established the foundry, was a man who had great ingenuity, and who could work his way out of any mechanical predicament, and could successfully plan and lay out the work for others, though he possessed no great faculty of doing the work himself. It is to his son, Colonel George H. Holbrook, who became an eminent musician that is due the credit of improving the tone of the bells and changing them from noisy machines to musical instruments.

George Handel Holbrook learned the clock-making and founding trade from his father and assisted him in the making of many bells. The younger Holbrook, like his father, was a talented musician. He played the violin and pipe organ, and he became very active in the musical life of his town and state. His father played the bass violin. He ran the business until 1871, having cast over 11,000 bells, including several hundred church bells. The foundry operated under the management of Holbrook family members until 1880 when it closed. Mr. Whatley found out that this Holbrook Bell Foundry, in which the courthouse bell was made, was active from 1822 to 1880; and that there are around 120 bells that are known to still exist from this foundry location. Mr. Whatley said that the 1838 Belfry Bell is not on the list because no one has sent the information. There were other locations of the Holbrook foundry around MA. The Holbrook foundry received many awards for the quality of its bells and George Handel Holbrook was recognized as “the foremost bell maker in America.”

Mr. Whatley found it interesting that Johnathan Worth, Hugh McCain and John Balfour Troy went all the way to Massachusetts to get a bell.

Chairman Johnson said an important thing to remember is that the 1909 Historic Courthouse had an uncertain future and the Commissioners had forethought to preserve the bell.

On motion of Qualls, seconded by Andrews, the HLPC voted unanimously to approve a Resolution of Support for moving the Courthouse 1838 Belfry Bell, as follows:

Resolution Supporting the Courthouse 1838 Belfry Bell Being Moved

WHEREAS, in August 1838, Johnathan Worth, Hugh McCain and John Balfour Troy were ordered by the Randolph County Justices to buy and hang a bell in the belfry of the 1835 County Courthouse; and

WHEREAS, the 1838 Belfry Bell was later moved to the belfry of the 1909 County Courthouse on Worth Street; and

WHEREAS, while the courthouse itself is one of Randolph County's most important architectural possessions, its bell was of great historical value; and

WHEREAS, the 1838 Belfry Bell is the earliest surviving artifact from Asheboro's past and was for 90 years installed in the belfry; and

WHEREAS, in 2002, the County Commissioners approved removing, restoring, and installing the original 1838 Belfry Bell in a glass case to be located outside the Clerk of Court office on the second floor of the new 2002 County Courthouse, no longer able to ring, but more visible than ever before.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Landmark Preservation Commission, in the best interest of the preservation of the 1838 Belfry Bell, fully supports the recommendation that the Courthouse 1838 Belfry Bell be moved back to the 1909 Historic Courthouse, where citizens can read and appreciate its history and heritage.

Approval of Minutes

On motion of Whatley, seconded by Dixon, the HLPC voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of September 23, 2014.

Adjournment

At 2:32 p.m., on motion of Andrews, seconded by Haithcock, the HLPC voted unanimously to adjourn.

Mac Whatley, Chairman

Amanda Varner, Clerk to the HLPC